DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 284 FL 022 058

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TITLE Learning with Rods: One Account.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 54p.; Master's Thesis, School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); FLES; *Instructional Materials; Language Skills; Lesson Plans; Questioning Techniques; *Second Language Instruction; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Cuisenaire Materials

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses one English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher's attempts to use cuisenaire rods as a language learning tool. Cuisenaire rods (sometimes called algebricks) vary in size from 1 x 1 x 10 centimeter sticks to 1 x 1 x 1 centimeter cubes, with each of the 10 sizes a different color. Although such rods have been used to teach mathematical concepts, they are also used to teach basic language concepts, such as numbers, colors, size, question words, and question-and-answer skills, as well as more abstract concepts. Several ESL lessons using cuisenaire rods are discussed, highlighting their implementation and the results. Such lessons encourage student questioning and discussion, because the teacher usually speaks only to stimulate response (hence teaching techniques associated with the rods are known as the Silent Way). An appendix contains a description of the use of cuisenaire rods to diagram sentences. (Contains 5 references.) (MDM)

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Learning With Rods: One Account

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont.

April, 1994

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about the author's exploration of cuisenaire rods as a language learning tool. It begins with the author's first rod lessons during his winter teaching internship at the International Language Institute of MA, in Northampton, Massachusetts, and continues through the writing of this paper about one year later. Lessons planned and presented by the author during this time are described here and are followed by the author's reflections on these lessons. In these reflections, he discusses what he feels the lessons revealed to him regarding the use of rods generally as a teaching tool and describes the connections he began to make between his experience with the rods and his developing understanding of an intriguing teaching approach often associated with the rods and known as the Silent Way.

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INTRODUCTION

I had always been curious about rods.

Riding trains all over Osaka, Japan, a large backpack at my feet stuffed with teacher manuals, reams of dog-eared, uncollated copies, and assorted ESL "idea" books (desperate sounding titles like Spicy Recipes for Tired Teachers, Grammarific!, or Butterflies In Your Nasal Cavity: The Pronunciation Book That Tickles), I'd occasionally see some teacher glide effortlessly by with a sleek, little case of cuisenaire rods tucked neatly under one arm, and I couldn't help but wonder. It may not be the best reason to be drawn initially to a teaching technique or approach but it's not the worst either.

Besides, most of the stuff in my backpack I was lugging around simply out of habit--that and perhaps a vague, slightly irrational fear of somehow not having something I ought to. Fact is, I had been gradually decreasing the number of things I was actually using from that bag, and what I *was* using was becoming simpler in nature. I began to rely more on pictures and objects and less on explanations and printed words, and the words I did use were usually just a few scattered, functional words or bits of words and not lengthy dialogues to be memorized or altered with substitutions. I was attempting to construct situations where the perception of

relatively simple objects and their manipulation could inspire and sufficiently explain language. I was, in a sense, already using rods.

It wasn't until much later, though, that I actually bought a set--after the fall, 1992, semester of the MAT program at the School for International Training (SIT). During that semester, I was intrigued by what I saw, read, and discussed regarding cuisenaire rods and a teaching approach often associated with the use of such rods, the Silent Way. I was especially attracted by what I felt was a kind of intensity that seemed to be present when students were learning in the Silent Way, and I saw the use of rods as contributing to that intensity. Like the pictures and objects I had already begun to rely on, the rods seemed to simplify things. They cut through all the pages of grammar rules, paradigms, and examples, and engaged the students in enjoyable, meaningful, and purposeful work. The students seemed rapt, completely involved in the task at hand. They seemed to be learning.

Although the use of cuisenaire rods appeared to be in a direction in which I have suggested my teaching was already moving, there also seemed to be much more to these little pieces of wood. This is what I hope to get at in this paper. The substance of this paper begins with my first rod lessons during my winter internship at the International Language Institute of MA, in Northampton, Massachusetts, and continues right through the writing of this paper about one year later. It consists of descriptions of rod lessons I've presented during this time and what I feel I've learned from these lessons and have been learning since.

I chose this method of organization because it seems most meaningful to me.

For all the talking, reading, watching, and thinking I did about cuisenaire rods, what really began to put it all together for me was just going ahead and using them. I not only discovered much that seemed new to me but began to understand for the first time many things I had come across in books and classes before. I was, and I still am, as Shakti Gattegno phrased it during her Silent Way presentation at SIT, coming to "know ideas as facts" by involving myself more fully in their exploration. In trying to recreate this exploration here, I hope I can present what I have learned in a more meaningful and accessible way and help remove the kind of mystery that for me seemed to initially surround the use of cuisenaire rods in language teaching.

This paper is certainly not the end of my exploration; it's only a piece out of the middle. The lessons recounted here aren't neat, polished, or necessarily illustrative of any single given teaching approach, my conclusions may seem slow in coming and the reader may in the end disagree with them, and I offer my apologies to teachers and students more familiar than myself with the Silent Way for any misrepresentation in this paper of Silent Way ideas or concepts. I refer to such concepts and quote from Silent Way literature when it seems to express what I want to say; my incomplete understanding of this approach may be at times be evident.

In the end, it may seem odd to begin with something as uncomplicated as a lot of colored pieces of wood and wind up discussing what I have learned about language teaching and learning, or talking about some of the underlying principles of a given educational theory, but that's more or less how it has happened for me. I do not think it is entirely unlike the experience of a language student beginning with the same

simple pieces of wood and winding up learning something as complex as language. So let's begin with the rods.

Sets of rods like the one I have are available from Educational Solutions, Inc., at 99 University Place, 6th Floor, New York, New York, 10003-4555. They consist of plastic rods of varying lengths and colors, the longest being the orange ones at 1x1x10 centimeters, followed by the 9 cm. long blue rods, then browns, blacks, dark greens, yellows, purples, light greens, and finally reds at 1x1x2 cm. There are also 1x1x1 cm., white cubes. Rods similar to these can sometimes be found in teaching supply stores or through other manufacturers. They are sometimes called cuisenaire rods and sometimes "algebricks," may vary slightly in the selection of colors used, and may be made of wood rather than plastic.

First used in the teaching of math, the rods came to be used by Caleb Gattegno for the learning of languages in the approach he developed known as the Silent Way. The rods are still associated by many with the Silent Way but are used in different ways by different people. The lessons recounted here are just a few from an array of possibilities as wide and as interesting as anyone's imagination.

Chapter 1

TAG QUESTIONS: THE FIRST CHALLENGE

It was a gray day in January. I sat on the floor, surrounded by tall, trembling stacks of index cards. Here and there a stack had toppled over, a tense or modal had tumbled across the yellow tiles. I was trying to reconstruct from memory some old index card game I once used with students to play around with tag questions. It's pretty simple, or at least I thought it was. Basically, you make two piles of cards, one pile with the beginnings of tag questions and the other with the tags. You shuffle and place each pile face down, then begin turning over one card from each stack and laying them next to each other in front of one or more students at a fairly quick pace, laying new cards on old, until a student notices a match (for example, "You're from Chicago," and "aren't you?"), at which time they yell "snap" or something like that. I remember it as being kind of fun.

I don't know what happened but somehow, when I did a test run with the piles I first made, there just weren't many matches. The next thing I knew, I became involved in some bizarre statistical analysis of matches, the variables being tense, aspect, number, person, and modals, and those variables soon represented by the trembling towers of index cards all around me. I was getting nowhere and it was

getting late, so I threw the cards away and ate dinner.

After dinner, I spilled a box of rods out onto a table. The colors sparkled and filled the room with an eerie, supernatural glow. Well, not really, but you have to remember it was only an hour ago that I was hungry, out of ideas, and swimming in index cards.

I began to think about how tag questions are used, what they mean.

The Lesson.

Six intermediate students sit around a small, low table. Scattered on the table in no logical fashion are nine rods, one each of the different colors and lengths found in a common set of rods. At one corner of the table is a small, inconspicuous box containing the rest of the rods. I do not include the white cubes in this and many other rod lessons because I feel uncomfortable asking students to call them rods.

I close my eyes, hold out my hands, and ask a student to take one rod from the box and put it in my hands. I hold the rod behind my back, open my eyes and look intently at the nine rods on the table. I ask, "It's a black rod, isn't it?" One student gasps, another stares wildly into my eyes, still another yawns and rolls her eyes. By the third time, they're all rolling their eyes because it doesn't take long to figure out that the colors of the rods correspond directly to their length and all one need do is look at the rods representing the nine length/color combinations to make a pretty good guess at the color of the rod being held behind one's back.

After the students practice correctly answering these first few tag questions that

I ask, they take turns holding the rods behind their backs and asking the tag questions. The other students continue to answer and I simply monitor the whole thing. While monitoring, I try to say as little as possible, relying instead on gestures.

I can use my fingers to represent words as the student speaks them, stopping and appearing to pull off a finger where there is an unnecessary word, wagging a finger where there is a misused word, keeping a finger down where a word needs to be added, pointing to the base of a finger where an inflection needs to be added or wiping a misplaced inflection away from there. I can pretend to catch a word as a student speaks it and, once caught, can do almost anything with this invisible word. I can throw it away and grind it into the floor, I can stretch it, I can add some small piece to the end of it, or I can eat it and silently speak it again, adding something new to it--a gesture, a morpheme, or an attitude.

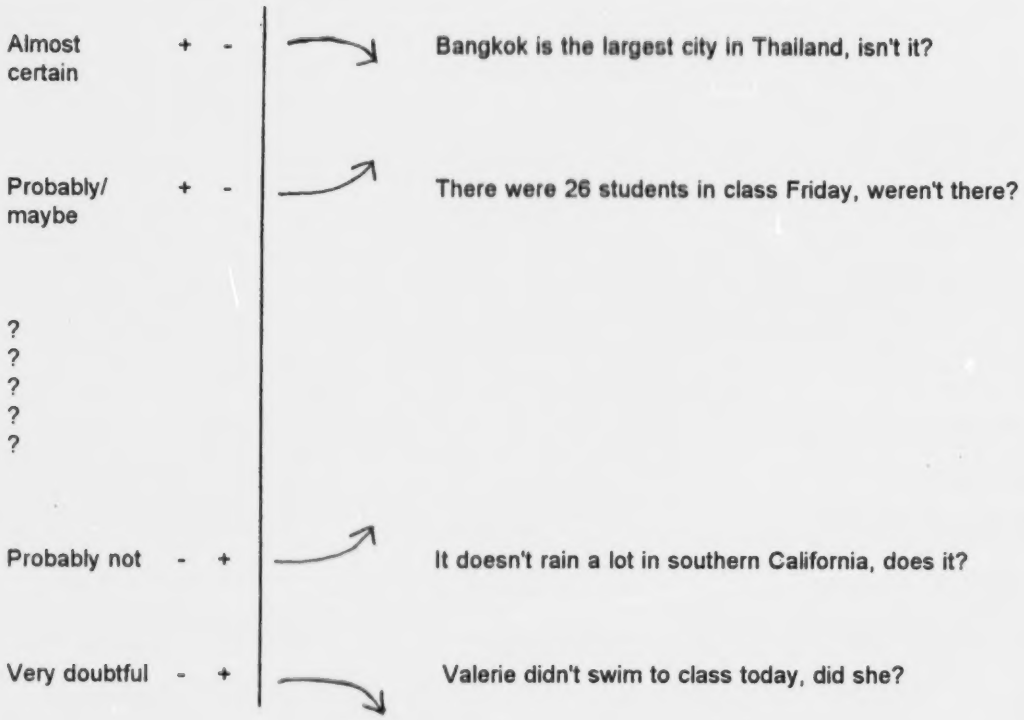
I also have written up on the board some key words and pieces of words. For this tag question lesson, I have scattered around the board "it," "has," "have," "does," "is," "are," "n't," "did," and "do." When a student has trouble finding one of these key bits, I need only point it out on the board. This type of monitoring is relatively quiet and non-threatening. I think sometimes the students aren't even aware that I'm doing it. They're certainly less aware of correction done this way than they would be if I asked the speaker to stop, listen to me, and try again.

After the students have practiced tag questions with the copula for a while, we move one. I pass the box around under the table and ask each student to take two rods and, keeping the rods covered with their hands, slip them up onto the table. I

explain that I'm going to count to three, at which time they should lift their hands off the rods for an instant, then cover them up again. After they do this, I ask, "Manuel, you have a red and a blue rod, don't you?" Manuel answers, then the students take over asking as well as answering similar questions based on the rods they all have under their hands.

We then move on to the past tense. I put about a dozen rods in the middle of the table, ask the students to close their eyes, then take or add one or more rods to those on the table. This time, I don't say anything. My hope is that, after getting used to these playful kinds of activities and after opening their eyes to find the pile changed and me with a crazy smile on my face, these intermediate level students will feel compelled to jump in with something like "You put two red rods on the table, didn't you?" or language close enough to be molded into an appropriate response through the use of the gestures I have already described. After practicing with this activity for a while, I put the rods away.

I go on to teach the different kinds of tag questions by giving the students some general statements and having them discuss how they feel about those statements, how strongly they may believe or doubt the statement. Using the chart like the one on the following page, we decide which if any tag questions we would make based on the statements, write those questions in the correct place on the chart, and practice speaking the questions with the rising and falling intonations indicated on the chart by the arrows.


Almost certain + -
Bangkok is the largest city in Thailand, isn't it?
Probably/ maybe + -
There were 26 students in class Friday, weren't there?
?
?
?
?
?
Probably not - +
It doesn't rain a lot in southern California, does it?
Very doubtful - +
Valerie didn't swim to class today, did she?

I then give the students some index cards on which I have written some fairly simple statements about myself. Some are obvious truths or lies, some probable truths or lies, and some are just plain tricky. The students are encouraged to decide how they feel about each statement and then, if appropriate, ask a tag question reflecting that feeling. On one, for example, I have written, "I can swim." The students agree that this is probably true, so they ask "You can swim, can't you?" The students then write on index cards some statements about themselves, exchange them, and continue to practice asking and answering tag questions while I monitor.

What I liked about the rod portion of this lesson was its simplicity and how

that simplicity kept the students focused on the language and its meaning. What I didn't like was that I felt the lesson was very limited in its use of rods and wasn't terribly engaging. It also tended to sputter at points, and I think that was mostly a result of my inexperience with rods. There wasn't that natural flow I like to imagine is in other lessons of mine. The students just seemed to devour so quickly the situations and ideas that took me hours to dream up, and that threw me off a little. It was all such a different pace.

Why did I eventually put the rods away? I just couldn't think of how to use them to get at and practice the things I got at using the chart and the index cards. That doesn't mean I won't think of a way in the future, it doesn't mean I will, and it doesn't mean I'll choose to use the rods even if I do think of a way. The reason I moved away from the rods when I did is probably the same reason I threw the index cards away the day before--I thought of something else.

I feel that the use of the rods gave the students some base from which to move onto the chart and the cards. The chart and the cards, while perhaps lacking in the intensity of the rods and somewhat undirected, were fun. There seemed to be more interaction among the students and they enjoyed learning about each other through the information they wrote on the cards.

What I Learned.

I met for the first time what I think is the most essential and exciting challenge in constructing this type of rod lesson, and that is to create a situation where the

meaning of the language being focused on is made absolutely clear. If, for example, I silently place two blue rods and one red one on a table before the students, pause, pick up a blue rod, place it on my head, and utter, "I'll have the linguini, please," I think it's safe to say meaning has not been made clear.

Moving along the continuum from this rather absurd example, however, I have seen lessons where meaning seems to be only approximated, where, for example, one student may be encouraged to pass a rod to another student, then say something like, "I have already passed the rod to Kyoko," as if this simple act represented the language used here to describe it. It doesn't; not by itself, anyway. "I gave Kyoko the rod," is as good if not better. Imagination must be used to construct an engaging situation where the meaning of the language being used on is present and, consequently, where meaningful practice can take place.

By meaningful practice, I mean practice not simply to exercise the mouth but also the mind--not repetition, but a thoughtful response to a changing set of circumstances that the student can easily see or otherwise perceive. This kind of practice is meaningful because the "use of the rods to create situations frees the students from having to guess what words mean and from translating, since the truth that triggers the words has been made visible and students can concentrate on the verbal material put into circulation and on becoming swift, accurate, and intelligible to others through clear and correct sounds" (Gattegno 1976).

In this particular lesson, in trying to create a situation where the meaning of tag questions was made absolutely clear, I first stepped back a bit. I threw away those

index cards and tried to get a more general look at tag questions, tried to see the forest. It then occurred to me that tag questions are often used to guess at something we already have a feeling one way or another about, kind of like checking some information. I let this feeling for the language be my general guide throughout the creation of this lesson, regardless of the particular verb or tense being used. I let the meaning of the language come first, then struggled with how to reflect that meaning with rods. Regardless of whether I succeeded or not, this was my goal.

What I've Learned Since.

What I've learned since this lesson is that the students usually don't need as much as I have given them, and that their learning may in fact be hindered as a result of this kind of overteaching. In this lesson, for example, I begin immediately with the tag question, and I give it to the students whole. Although the students go through the exercises I provide, they may not be aware of what they are really doing. I think it would be better if they came upon the tag question in a broader area of language, then formed it themselves.

If I teach this again I may begin with a big pile of rods on the table. I could slip one or two rods behind a book, point at a question mark on the board, then simply wait for somebody to ask me any question appropriate to this situation. After practicing several types of general questions like this, we could then move into a more specific focus on tag questions. In focusing on the tag questions, the rods might be presented and manipulated as described in the previous lesson, but from the very

beginning I would like to let the students make the tag questions themselves. I think a student could hold that first rod behind her back and, having already worked with the rods a little and become familiar with their color and length correspondence, she could create the first tag question.

It is hoped that the meaning of tag questions is present in the way I choose to present and manipulate the rods. The students should see and feel the meaning. Indeed, my purpose in suggesting the lesson next time begin with general questions then move into tag questions is to make meaning clearer by contrasting tag questions with something else. If I succeed in making this meaning clear, then all the student needs to create that first meaningful tag question is the form. Since a question like, "Is it a black rod?" isn't so far in form from "It's a black rod, isn't it?" this shouldn't be too difficult. I can wiggle, twist and transpose my fingers, point at the words and bits of words I've written on the blackboard, or simply give the students some silence in which to think and perhaps even remember something learned before. The key, as I have said, is getting the meaning across.

On the cover of my box of rods is written, "For the subordination of teaching to learning." That's a maxim found throughout Silent Way literature. Another one is "Only awareness is educable." In creating, teaching, and reflecting on the lesson described here, I think I am beginning to understand what is meant by these two cryptic sounding statements. I have found myself becoming more concerned with bringing students to an awareness of some aspect of language rather than simply providing a stimulus and response, and I have begun to see how I can do this through

my own silence and careful attention to these students and their perception of, among other things, the rods and how they are presented. This particular lesson may not even be salvageable, but what I have learned as a result is invaluable and has carried over into every other lesson that has followed.

Chapter 2

CONDITIONALS: MUCH LANGUAGE AND LITTLE VOCABULARY

Shakti Gattegno was going on and on about functional, semi-luxury, and luxury vocabulary. Semi-luxury vocabulary? The room was full of SIT students and staff, all listening intently. Some of them were nodding. I didn't have the slightest idea what Ms. Gattegno was talking about.

The Lesson.

Six intermediate students sit around a small, low table. There is a box of rods in the middle. I'm sitting away from the table, outside the circle of faces there. Scattered on the board, I have written "would," "if," "n't," "will," and "s," "had," "have." I ask the students to each take and put on the table in front of them about half a dozen rods. After they have done so, I look at these separate piles of rods and utter some sentences like, "If Manuel gives Oscar two red rods, he'll only have six left," "If Akiko takes another blue rod from the box, she'll have two," or "If Jintana put two blue rods back in the box and took one yellow rod, she would have five rods."

I do this until it seems the students understand what I'm talking about, then I encourage them to produce such sentences. I monitor the production of these

sentences in the same way I have described in the previous chapter. Once it seems the students can produce some conditional sentences comfortably and they begin to seem a little bored, I begin a kind of game. I utter a conditional sentence using pronouns rather than the students' names--"If he took a blue rod from her, she wouldn't have any"--then ask them to raise their hand if they can replace the pronouns with appropriate names. Often, there are several possibilities in the choice of names to replace these pronouns; the only rule is that the sentence appropriately reflect the reality of the rods on the table. The first student to raise his or her hand and correctly reconstruct the sentence with appropriate names continues the game by creating and uttering a new conditional sentence using only pronouns and the game continues.

Throughout this practice, I make no effort to draw the students' attention to the difference in meaning between a pair of conditionals like "If Oscar gives Sophie one red rod, Sophie will have two red rods" and "If Oscar gave Sophie one red rod, Sophie would have two red rods." While there is, of course, a difference in meaning between these two sentences, there is also a similarity, and the students are learning this.

In the next activity, I ask the students to leave the table and pair up. I ask each pair to stand by one of the lines of rods that I have placed on the floor. The lines are of the same length but consist of different combinations of rods laid end to end. In one row, for example, there may be three dark green, one light green, two yellow, one brown, three pink, and one orange rod; in another row of the same length, there may be two orange, one blue, three red, four pink, one light green, and one black rod.

I ask one student from each pair to move about ten feet away from their partner. I ask those students still standing near the lines of rods to pick the rods up and, when I give a signal, throw them one at a time, as quickly as possible to their partner, who should try to catch as many as possible. After they have done this, each pair arranges the rods caught into one line and those not caught into another line. What we wind up with are six lines of rods of various lengths, two lines to each pair of students.

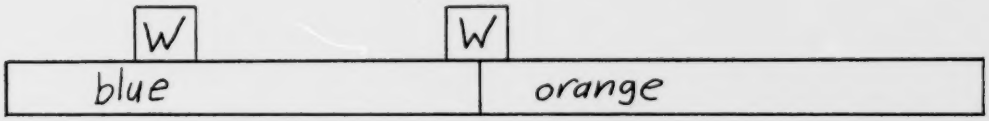
I point at "if" on the board and wait. Usually, some student will attempt a conditional sentence. What I am after here, as has probably become obvious, is a counterfactual conditional--sentences like "If Oscar had caught two more red rods, his line would be longer than Manuel's" or "If Akiko hadn't caught that pink rod, she would have lost." Students usually can create these sentences with just a little help. The key words are, after all, on the board and the meaning is in rows on the floor. I may write "win" or "long" on the board to help spark some ideas as to how they may approach this situation. Often, however, the students have more interesting approaches. One student, for example, came up with "If I had gotten more sleep last night, I would have caught more."

The students practice until they seem comfortable producing such sentences. There is often some curiosity concerning a sentence where the cause clause is in the past and the result clause is in the present and a sentence where both clauses are in the past. Continued practice can help make this distinction clear but I may draw attention to it with a time line. I place a blue and an orange rod end to end, the blue to the

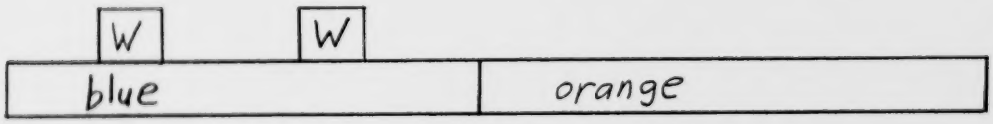
student's left and the orange to their right. I quickly establish some meaning by placing a white cube on the blue rod and saying "I woke up at 7 o'clock," moving the cube to the orange rod and saying "I'm going to eat dinner at home," then moving the cube to the junction of the blue and orange rods and saying "I'm in school now."

Then I apply this time line concept to a sentence that the students have already generated during the course of this lesson, a sentence that has been triggered by the students' perceptions of the rods and their manipulation and, therefore, a sentence that already has some meaning.

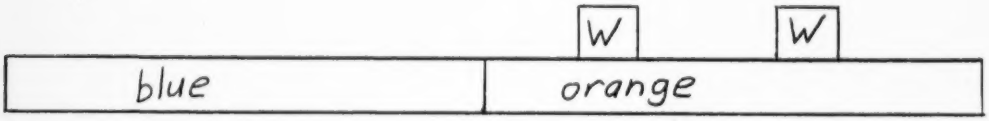
For example, a sentence like, "If Oscar had caught two more red rods, his line would be longer than Manuel's," would be represented as below:



For a sentence like, "If Akiko hadn't caught that pink rod, she would have lost," I construct:



I may even add the following construction for a sentence like, "If he comes to the party, I'm going to leave:"



Finally, I spread magazine pictures and drawings across the floor and I encourage students to talk about these pictures in any way they want. Because of what they have just practiced, they will almost certainly begin to use conditional sentences but I don't make this a requirement for their speaking. I keep it open, accept any kind of sentence and help the students correct any errors by using the gestures I have described earlier.

I think this lesson was strong because it seemed to make clear and accessible to students an area of English I think is often seen as being more difficult than it really is. I think this lesson was weak in that it didn't seem engaging enough. This was especially true of the last part, using the magazine pictures, but it also seemed true of the rod portion. When asked for feedback at the end of the lesson, the students confirmed my feeling about the magazine picture portion of the lesson but said the rod portion did not seem to drag as I had thought. It's that silence that makes it seem so, I guess. It takes some getting used to that "different pace" I spoke of in my tag question lesson.

What I Learned.

I began to understand in this lesson, taught during my winter internship, what Shakti Gattegno had been talking about months before in the auditorium building at SIT, this thing about functional, semi-luxury, and luxury vocabulary. Or, more specifically, I began to understand the idea often expressed by Silent Way teachers of focusing students' perceptions more on the "glue" of the language initially than on the expansion of vocabulary and I came to understand how rods can be used to do this.

The rods provide brightly colored, easily replaceable nouns so that the students may focus their energy more appropriately on the stuff in between, the functional vocabulary, those words which cannot be described as easily through a one-to-one correspondence to words in the students' native tongue. Caleb Gattegno describes it as a vocabulary where "the only way open is to reach the area of meaning which the words cover, and to find in oneself whether this is a new experience which yields something of the spirit of the new language, or whether there is an equivalent experience expressed differently in one's own" (Gattegno 1963). Those words and bits of words I have written on the board for the lessons described here are examples of this kind of vocabulary.

This focus on the glue of the language is what I think makes a good rod lesson so good, so intense. It's like super-concentrated language right into a main artery. After all, is it really important that we learn right away the difference between a dining room and a kitchen so that we may learn some prepositions of place? Do we really have to go into the different kinds of stores and buildings before we get on to

the business of learning to give street directions? Wouldn't it be better to avoid these distractions at first, to limit vocabulary in order to get at the most important vocabulary, and perhaps to get at the spirit of the language in so doing?

I agree with Gattegno when he writes that the focus on functional vocabulary "allows us to work on the formation of a natural way of using the melody of a foreign language . . . to gain from the start something of the spirit of the language that is usually left for much later in linguistic studies" and that "we are giving our students something of great value by restricting the vocabulary but extending as much as we can the length of the statements uttered with ease, and in a way one uses one's own language" (Gattegno 1963).

Of course, there comes a time to move beyond the functional vocabulary and into the semi-luxury and luxury vocabularies in order to communicate about something other than rods. This can be done easily enough, and in fact is what I tried to facilitate using the chart and index cards in the tag question lesson and with the magazine pictures in the conditional sentence lesson. I believe it is worth noting, however, that students can acquire these vocabularies relatively easily by themselves. It may therefore be argued that by focusing initially on the functional vocabulary, on that part of vocabulary that yields more of the spirit of a language, we are allowing students to become more independent learners.

I liked the lesson overall, but more for the potential I felt it had than how it stood at the time. Something seemed a little strange, a little artificial, and that part with the magazine pictures thrown on the floor at the end was pretty weak.

What I've Learned Since.

I think a problem with this lesson is that it seems to lump together and present all at once a large area of language without providing for enough meaningful practice throughout. I have taught this lesson several times since, and have changed it each time. I like it much better now but it still needs some work. What I do at the moment is move back and forth more frequently between using rods and using other materials and activities. This allows me to better suit these other materials and activities to the smaller area of language just practiced with rods, helping me for example get at some of the difference between those first two conditionals practiced together at the beginning of the lesson described above. I also think alternating the type of activity like this makes the lesson a little more enjoyable for the students.

For reasons I have already discussed in the tag questions chapter, I begin this lesson now by giving the students only what they need. After they take their rods, rather than modelling the first conditional sentence for them I simply point to a great, big "if" on the board and wait, as I did at a later point in the lesson just described. As long as the students already have some familiarity with conditional sentences, as did the students in the lesson described here, this is usually sufficient to trigger some conditionals. To the words that I had written on the board before I have added "take," "took," "give," "gave," "from," "to," "have," "back," "it," "them," and "put." I use these to guide the students through any trouble they may encounter and also to direct focus onto the first two types of conditionals generated in the original lesson.

That these two conditional sentences are introduced together and with no

perceptible difference in meaning between them during this rod portion of the lesson may also be a cause for concern. It is my belief, however, that in the situation created here with the rods, either conditional would be acceptable. There are other situations where either conditional would be acceptable, as well, the choice between the two reflecting "a degree of confidence in the speaker's mind concerning the fulfillment of the condition" (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1983).

Practically speaking, though, introducing these two conditionals in this manner may be unnecessarily confusing and may suggest that these two types of conditionals are more similar than different. Ideally, I would like to discover some way the rods can be presented so that the difference between these two conditionals is made clear but I have been unable so far to meet that challenge. Within the limits of the rod presentation as described here, I might try introducing only one of the conditionals while continuing to accept either. One thing I have done to try to get at the difference between these two conditionals is devise the following activity to follow the rod presentation.

I have each student write six halves of conditional sentences, three conditions and three results. I shuffle these, hand them back, then ask each student to complete the sentences, to add either the missing condition or result. On the board, I have written a long line with "0%" at one end and "100%" at the other. I draw attention to this line by saying something like "We're all going to France this evening." Assuming we aren't in or near France, the students will help me place this statement somewhere near 0% on the line, where I write "If we all went to France . . ." and have the

students decide together on some appropriate result, for example ". . . we'd have a great time." Then, if we're in Japan and approaching the rainy season for example, I might say "Tomorrow, it's going to rain," and, with the students, place this statement over near the other end of the line and create a sentence beginning with "If it rains tomorrow . . ."

I then ask the students to read out loud the conditional sentences they all co-wrote, everyone pitching in to help correct any mistakes and me doing my part with my gestures. I direct the students' attention to the probability line when I feel it's appropriate. If, for example, a sentence like "If I win a million dollars, I'll buy a yacht" occurred, I would ask the students to determine where the condition of this sentence would fall on the probability line and rewrite it accordingly--"If I won a million dollars, I would buy a yacht."

After practicing these two types of conditional sentences in this manner for a while, I move on to that part of the lesson described in which the students first throw rods to their partners, and then use the results to create the "unrealized" type of conditional. Following this rod presentation, I show the students a long time-line on which are written many significant events in my life that, it is hoped, will suggest to the students some opportunities to create unrealized conditional sentences. This is also a good opportunity for the students or me to introduce modals appropriate to the situation. This should result in sentences like, "If you hadn't met your wife's father, you probably wouldn't have married your wife" or "If you were born in China, you might not be an English teacher." After practicing with my time line, I have the

students make time lines of their own lives, pair up, and practice a little more.

It seems appropriate at this point to mention another important thing I feel I am becoming more aware of since first teaching this conditional lesson, and that is the challenge presented not by the language but by the students.

The first time that I taught this lesson *without* speaking the first conditional sentences, when the students had only chosen some rods and watched as I silently pointed to "if" on the board, I had one student utter the following: "If Takako gives me a red rod, I'll have a flag of German." What could I say? All I wanted was a nice, neat "If Takako gives me a red rod, I'll have two red rods," or something simple like that.

I was surprised. It is unfortunate for the student that I was surprised, but I was. It is unfortunate for the student that I didn't expect him to be capable of thinking up something this clever because I was so focused on teaching him a certain type of conditional sentence, and then a certain type after that; I was so concerned with giving him something I saw him lacking that I failed to see the imagination and wit he possessed. I had been opening the lesson up more to allow the students a greater role in leading the lesson; I was subordinating teaching to learning and, as a result, I began to be presented with the unexpected challenge of keeping up with my students.

I have become aware of a tension in my teaching since working with rods. It's a tension between following where the student goes, working on the students while they work on the language, and leading the students through a series of activities I feel will allow them to learn the language most effectively. The reader will notice how I

describe my lesson plans. There is clearly an order, a sequence to them, but the more I subordinate my teaching to the students' learning, the more I get dragged off my little course.

Should I, for example, tap out that entire first conditional sentence rather than simply pointing to "if" in order to avoid distractions like the German flag or anything other than one of the two types of conditional I'm looking for? Should I ask the students to come up with as many conditional sentences as possible with the magazine pictures at the end of this lesson rather than just spreading the pictures out and waiting for anything appropriate? When am I stifling the student and when am I helping him by directing his focus where I think it ought to be? When am I setting him adrift without direction and when am I allowing him to enjoy himself through self-expression and at the same time lead me to an area of language he needs to focus on?

At any rate, it's something I am becoming more and more aware of. I see the value of allowing the students to lead the teacher--I see the feeling of power and confidence this instills in the students, the relevance it brings to what they focus on, and the learning that takes place in the process of their discovering an area of language rather than being led there. At the same time, I see the value in a series of well-planned, perhaps even timeworn activities aimed at teaching the students a specific area of language. I don't think these two approaches are mutually exclusive and I suppose too much of either would produce a teacher who was either completely unaware of the students or completely unaware of the rules of the language being learned.

Chapter 3

NONREFERENTIAL "THERE": CREATIVITY AND ANALYSIS

Unlike the preceding two cases, this chapter is not based on a lesson taught during my winter internship, but on my experience preparing a presentation for my English Applied Linguistics class in the semester following my internship. Students in this class were responsible for planning and presenting analyses of specific areas of English and demonstrating some ways teachers could help meet the challenges those areas presented for learners. We did these presentations in pairs and on topics chosen from a list. By the time my partner and I made our way to the table with the sign-up sheet, all the good stuff was taken.

The Lesson.

There are 18 students. They are seated facing a blackboard and a small table in an average size classroom.

In preparing my analysis of nonreferential "there," I read the "Nonreferential *it* or *there* Subjects" chapter in The Grammar Book (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1983) about twenty times. During the presentation, I used a paradigm used throughout the course by instructor Diane Larsen-Freeman of a pie chart divided into three areas--

form, meaning, and use. In the form section of my nonreferential "there" pie I noted its placement in the subject position of sentences. The rest of the pie, as I understood it, was occupied almost entirely by use--the contrast of the use of nonreferential "there" with its absence or with the use of referential "there." It was here that I saw the challenge, particularly in the contrast between nonreferential "there" and its absence.

For example, it seemed a common mistake by ESL learners was to avoid the nonreferential "there" when an alternative though less appropriate form was possible--"Two trees are in front of the house" as opposed to "There are two trees in front of the house," in an oral description of some scene. Another common mistake seemed to be the use of the nonreferential "there" when describing something that, although not yet introduced by the speaker, is already assumed to exist--"There is spicy food in Thailand" as opposed to the more appropriate "Thai food is spicy." This seemed like a good place to start a lesson.

I asked a volunteer to stand at the small table and face the class. Before him were some rods, a cup, a pen, and a sheet of paper. A small paper bag lay inconspicuously on the floor next to the table. I stood behind the volunteer, also facing the class. I took out the same number and type of objects that the volunteer had before him, then a couple more: a small paper circle and triangle, and a few more rods. I made a show of carefully arranging them on the floor in some random order, putting the pen in the cup, the blue rod in front of the cup, one of two red rods on top of the blue rod, etc. Then I asked the students to describe the placement of my

objects to the volunteer so he could copy it.

The students began by telling him what to do with some of the things he already had before him. In this case, they did not use the nonreferential "there." They used sentences like "One of the red rods is on the blue rod." When they came to something that was not present on the table, being good native speakers of English, the students used the nonreferential "there"--"There is a small paper circle under the cup." At this point the volunteer was at a loss. I had anticipated this, and jerked on some fishing line I had attached to the paper bag at his feet. When the volunteer went to investigate, he found a pair of scissors. He took the scissors, cut a circle out of the sheet of paper on the table, and placed the circle under the cup. Also in the bag were almost all the other things the volunteer needed to copy the arrangement I had made behind his back. The class continued directing the volunteer until the arrangement was completed.

Although the students in this lesson were native English speakers, I really don't think much would have to be changed to adapt this lesson to an ESL context. I would probably write some relevant functional vocabulary on the board and provide more direction with the kind of gestures I've already described.

I liked the lesson because it seemed to more or less get at a subtle but, I feel, important point and it did so simply and with some precision. It also seemed to engage the students, keeping the focus on them and the language rather than the teacher. I really needed to do very little.

There are some small but important changes I would make that I feel are worth

mentioning here. I am not comfortable with the fact that all the volunteer needed was in the bag. It would have been better if I had scattered things around more and taken into account what would already be present in the room. The pen, for example, certainly did not have to be supplied by me, its absence providing a good opportunity for the natural use of the nonreferential "there"--"There is a blue pen in the cup." The volunteer need only look around the classroom for a pen, perhaps ask a student.

I also would have liked to move on from the rods and objects to a less artificial situation that would be capable of providing the students with many opportunities to choose between the nonreferential "there" and its absence. I tried to think of something they could describe that would have many given and unknown aspects. First, I thought of a bicycle. There are many givens--handlebar, wheels, chain--but the description of these seems forced. "The handlebar is . . . 42 centimeters long." or "The tires are . . . black." Not very interesting. Furthermore, there don't seem to be enough truly unknown aspects about a bicycle. What is left after the handlebar, wheels, chain, and frame? Maybe a basket?

At any rate, I have not taught this lesson since, possibly because I still haven't been able to make this jump from the rods to a more natural situation. I think it is a worthwhile pursuit to make these kinds of connections from practicing language with the rods to practicing language with the world, especially given the focus of this particular lesson which deals with a somewhat subtle aspect of English. Perhaps I'm asking too much of that natural situation, asking that it provide more practice than is realistically possible in choosing between the two limited possibilities presented.

Perhaps the very focus of this lesson is too limited. I include this lesson here, though, for what I felt it has taught me, which I discuss below.

What I Learned.

I learned how helpful a thorough analysis of a piece of language can be in planning the presentation of that language with rods, and how Diane Larsen-Freemen's pie chart and The Grammar Book sharpens that analysis. While I found it productive in preparing my tag question lesson to stand back and get a wider view in order to uncover some of the meaning of tag questions, I found this insufficient in approaching such a broad area of language as the nonreferential "there." I needed an extra step. I had to first dissect it a little to arrive at one manageable challenge within that language area, specifically the use or absence of nonreferential "there" with nouns modified by either adjectives or prepositional phrases of location. Then, I could begin to think of standing back and trying to uncover the meaning of that smaller, more accessible piece of language. This doesn't mean, however, that the tag question lesson can not benefit from this additional analysis I used in preparing the nonreferential "there" lesson; it just didn't seem as essential.

It was also in this lesson that I feel I was made more aware of the importance of imagination in figuring out how meaning is to be honestly represented using rods. I remember a workshop on rods I gave at the end of the spring semester, at the SIT Sandanona Conference. After talking about some ideas for a while, I gave participants some lesson objectives and some rods and I asked them to come up with a lesson. I

went up to see what one group was doing, and one of the participants said that, while she had come up with a lesson for the passive voice, it was a lesson that did not address the most common use of the passive voice and, in fact, could lead to confusion later.

I believe this participant was allowing the rods rather than the language lead her to a lesson. I asked the student to forget about the rods and talk a bit about the most common use of the passive voice, where she felt most of the meaning lay. When she had finished, I asked her to see if there was some way to represent with rods what she had just talked about. I really didn't know if there was a way, but then again I didn't expect that student before to say, "If Takako gives me a red rod, I'll have a flag of German." It seems I'm always being surprised.

In fact, as we were talking, some of the other participants started playing with some toy guns I had brought to the presentation for an entirely, unrelated reason. They had grown bored with just the rods and the table the rods were on, so they stood the rods on their ends and started shooting foam darts at them with the toy guns. Then a couple of them started to informally put together a lesson for modals of possibility. "He's probably going to hit the pink rod" or "She'll knock the red rod off the blue one." It was inspiring.

The point as I understand it is, do what you have to. Use toy guns, fishing line, whatever it takes to honestly represent the language. If you run into difficulty, remember what Gattegno says: "There are no really difficult forms which cannot be illustrated through the proper situation involving rods and actions on them about which

one makes statements by introducing specific words whose associated meaning is obvious. What teachers must do is to arrange for practice so that students' minds are triggered to use these new words spontaneously " (Gattegno 1976). It may not be true, but remember it anyway. You never know.

What I Have Learned Since.

In view of what I have written about the tension I have begun to notice in my teaching between guiding the student through well-prepared lesson plans and allowing the student to guide me, it may seem that the praise I have in this chapter for a thorough analysis of a language point before its presentation argues for guiding the student. After all, why go to all that trouble if the student is going to wonder off into another area? The more I teach, though, and the more I challenge myself to look at language in new ways, the better I come to know the language and the more easily I can follow the student wherever the student goes.

I also do not mean to suggest by all this talk of linguistic analysis and demand on creativity that you can't just wing it, that opportunities don't just leap out crying to be explained with nothing but rods. They do. A friend was explaining to me once what she had just studied in an English class for one hour that morning--the phrases "none of the," "all of the," "neither of the," and "both of the." It became quickly apparent to me that she had completely misunderstood the meaning of this language.

She described the class to me. There were six students. The teacher followed a student workbook very closely. If the students appeared to be filling in the blanks

correctly, the teacher did not question their understanding of the language. It reminded me of college algebra class I was once in where I could usually find the answer to the problems given but had absolutely no idea of what I was doing and would most certainly be lost if asked to generalize any of the steps that led me to fill in the blank correctly. I passed the class without flying colors and learned almost nothing. I felt like a trained seal. Anyway, there occurred to me no better way to explain this language than with rods. I did so with no lengthy preparation, and my friend learned in ten minutes what she couldn't in one hour filling blanks in a workbook.

I heaped some rods into piles and placed some others side by side in pairs, some of the piles and some of the pairs were of one color and some were of different colors. I asked my friend to use the language introduced that morning to describe the rods before her. I only nodded when she used the language correctly and shook my head to indicated when she didn't. With no lengthy preparation on my part, she learned in ten minutes of practice what she couldn't in one hour of filling in blanks in a workbook.

Chapter 4

THE OTHER DAY

Unsatisfied with the lessons in this paper, tired of always seeming to somehow miss the mark when teaching with rods, frustrated at trying to understand what the Silent Way is and how to use it, I went to teach three students here in Osaka, Japan, the other day.

The Lesson.

Using the Silent Way sound color chart, the students and I worked on pronunciation for a while. The sound color chart consists of 58 rectangles of various colors, each indicating a particular sound. By pointing to different combinations of these rectangles, students can be directed to utter words or strings of words. In this way, the teacher is freed from the kind of modelling that is so often used to teach pronunciation and he may concentrate instead on listening to the students' sounds and directing their attention to problem areas. Because the students do not rely on the teacher for producing their sounds and as they begin to develop a sort of self-confidence or inner criteria for making the different sounds required in the new language, the students are also freed.

I had the students concentrate on words I knew we were going to use in the upcoming lesson. They practiced speaking the following words individually and in short combinations: "take," "took," "put," "in," "on," "off," "out," "it," "them," "under," "from," "and," "one," "of," "the," "a," "turn," "up," "side," "down," "right," "back," "next," "to," and "between," "other," "another," "which," "is," and "are," "s." I then wrote these words up on the board.

These particular students and I had worked with the sound color chart before, so this part of the lesson was painless, productive, and took only about fifteen minutes. When using this lesson with students who have had no experience using the chart, I have sometimes skipped the chart and begun with the words, writing them on the board then silently pointing to them individually then in strings. As with the chart, I do not model. I listen to what the student says and direct his attention to problem areas in his pronunciation through the use of gestures and/or short explanations like "make it shorter here," or "more energy in the middle." I prefer beginning with the chart because it appropriately keeps the confusing script of English separate from the pronunciation and it allows the student to focus more easily on discreet sounds. The chart requires a larger initial investment of time and energy for both me and the students, however, and sometimes I'm just not up to it.

Once pronunciation has been practiced sufficiently, I arrange a group of objects on a table before me. There are two blue rods in a coffee cup, which is on a magazine. Also on the magazine is a red rod and under the magazine is a pen. Next to this I have another red rod, which is on a black rod, next to which is a spoon. On

the other side of the magazine are two yellow rods. I ask the students to describe the scene before them.

By pointing at appropriate words on the board, I help them where necessary to form sentences like "There are two blue rods in the cup" and "There is a red rod on the magazine." I can then help them string together these pieces to make very long sentences like, "One of two red rods is on a black rod, which is between a spoon and a magazine. Under the magazine is a pen and on it is another red rod and a cup, in which are two blue rods."

After they've described the scene, I ask them to close their eyes. I take one of the red rods away, ask the students to open their eyes and to tell me what I did. I help them if need be with the sentence "You took the red rod off the black rod." I put it back, have them close their eyes again, and take a blue rod out of the cup. We continue like this, the students eventually taking over my role in manipulating the rods, and create sentences like, "You took one of the blue rods out of the cup and put it under the magazine," "You took the yellow rods off the table, put one in the cup and the other inside the magazine," "You took the pen out from under the magazine and put it next to it," "You took the red rod which was on the magazine and put it on the other red one," and "You turned the cup upside down."

To make the sentences longer, I can have them keep their eyes open to watch me perform a long series of actions, then recount the whole string of events. We can move into relative clauses and the past perfect with sentences like "You put the red rod that dropped off the table into your pocket," or "You took the yellow rod you had

put in the cup and put it on the chair, then took the one you had taken off the magazine and put it back."

I can also have them give me and each other directions--"Take the two yellow rods and put them on your head." I can draw attention to a series of sentences like "Put a yellow rod in the cup. Now put in the red one. Now add a blue." We can introduce "turn the light on" or "turn on the light," then "turn it off and turn it back on."

By introducing just a little more functional vocabulary, the lesson continues to explode. Add "after," "before," and "-ing," and we have "After he turned it off, she turned it back on," and "Before turning the radio on, he put the black rod in his pocket." Add some semi-luxury and luxury vocabulary and the students can tell each other how to make their favorite food or operate some machine.

I have used this lesson about five times since and something new has been added each time. The students and I have found it immensely satisfying. This lesson is the first I have presided over as a teacher where I could begin to feel the intensity I had seen before and briefly described in the introduction to this paper. The students are positively glued to the rods, seemingly mesmerized by the sound of their own voices and how the language seems to wriggle in their hands.

I am free to watch their work and help them correct their mistakes with a simple gesture here or there. I am also able to relax and to watch for opportunities the students present to expand the language being focused on. It is this ability to relax and watch that has allowed the lesson to expand. It is the power of the students that

has in the short life of this lesson added relative clauses and additional functional vocabulary like "after," "before," and "-ing." My students will no doubt continue to teach me more and more if I continue to present them with the opportunities to do so.

What I'm Learning.

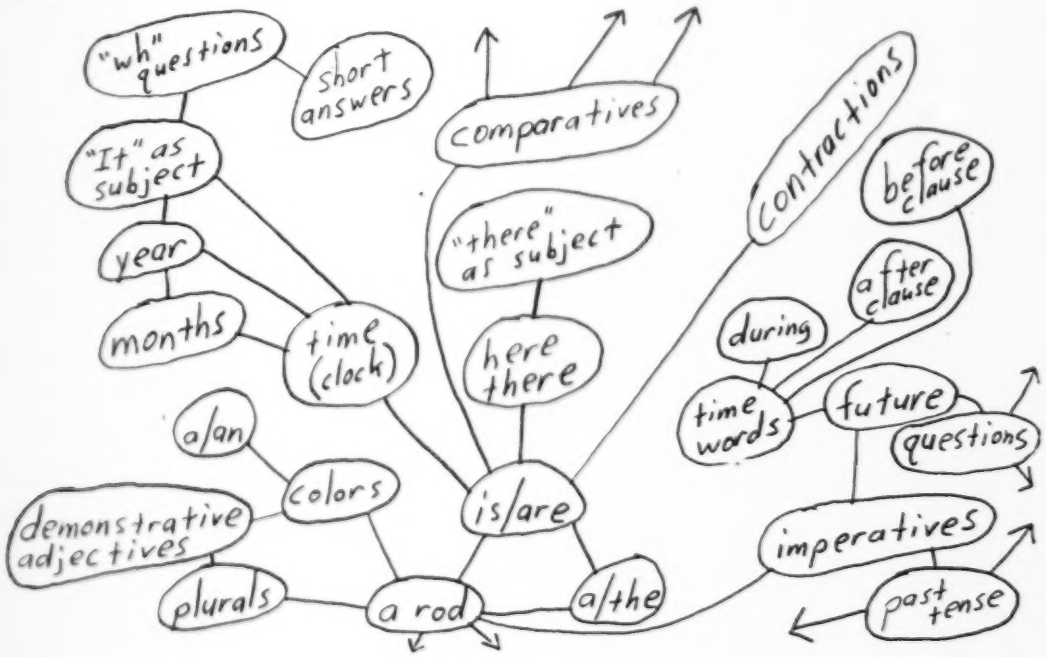
. . . is difficult to accurately describe since it's all so current. Perhaps, in the difference between the lesson described above and those that preceded it, the reader can see more clearly than I what I am learning, or what can be learned from what I'm doing. Let me take a stab at trying to organize and present what's floating around in my head. It was just the other day, after all.

I think I see the reason now for those curious bubble diagrams used by some Silent Way teachers to sequence or cluster grammar or functional vocabulary. I've reproduced a portion of one of these things on the next page. What before looked like doodling more than anything else now looks like the best way to describe what happens in lessons like the one recounted here. I see how these connected bubbles accurately represent how a lesson like this, in the hands of the students, can explode and expand in many possible directions.

So why didn't it explode before? That's a good question. I have a couple theories. One is that there are trap doors in the language--little openings where you fall right into the language--and this is the first trap door I came across. What makes a trap door a trap door and how can you find more? I don't know. Maybe a trap door is a trap door because it's based less on the verb-tense aspect system and more on

areas of functional vocabulary that tend to occur together. Maybe rods simply lend themselves more to one type of lesson than another--to the two-word verbs of motion and prepositions of place rather than the more ethereal properties of something like conditional sentences. Maybe it's magic.

It's certainly something to think about but what seems most important to me at the moment are these students staring at the rods and cups and things, their eyes darting around and their brains spinning. The lesson is taking off of its own accord and cutting across borders I have unconsciously etched within the language, borders roughly parallel to the chapters you might find in a grammar book. It holds students almost in a trance, frees the teacher from doing so much teaching, and always seems to bring out something new and eventually winds up somewhere else in the language. It's really exciting.



CONCLUSION

Although the use of rods was in many ways consistent with the direction my teaching had been moving in, it was in other ways very different. There was a minimalism that was a little frightening. What was I to do, after all, with just a bunch of colored pieces of wood? I'm still figuring that out.

It is this slow, haltering figuring out that I have tried to describe in this paper. I have done this rather than offer carefully selected pearls of wisdom for two reasons: one, I don't have any, and two, even if I did, they'd still be pearls--hard and hazy. It took me a year to crack some of these; I hope I have given the reader a look inside.

At times I feel like what I was doing was very simple, that these rods and some of the ideas I was running up against were just different, like a foreign functional vocabulary that explains a world no more complicated than the one my mother tongue describes, just in a different way. Like the study of a foreign functional vocabulary, a question seems to arise for every one answered.

At the moment, the biggest question for me concerns how the functional vocabulary is exploited initially in the Silent Way. Some sentences I have seen put together by students under the direction of experienced Silent Way teachers, and some sentences my own students are beginning to put together, have seemed terribly

unnatural. They are not unlike the sentences I neatly skipped over in my reading of Caleb Gattegno's The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages. In the "Exploiting the Functional Vocabulary" chapter of that book, Mr. Gattegno suggests bizarre sentences like "Give these to them to give them to these" in directing a student to give two rods to two other students so that they may then give these same two rods to another pair of students (Gattegno 1976). I quickly moved onto a part of the book that made sense to me.

I have always tried to represent English only as it is used in what I imagined to be the most natural way. It seems to me that the exploitation of the functional vocabulary as suggested by Gattegno and other Silent Way teachers lends itself more to how language can theoretically be used, regardless of the frequency with which you might hear the particular sentence being uttered or whether you'd actually hear such a sentence at all. I first found this idea kind of odd but have become more and more intrigued by it and have returned to that strange chapter many times since.

I have begun to see the value of taking this functional vocabulary and twisting and turning it into ridiculous shapes so that we may find where the language is jointed. It's like knitting in a very small box with very long needles. The restricted vocabulary is the small box, and if you can maneuver those needles in there and knit a sentence, then you've learned so much of the language that you can knit beautifully outside the box.

After all, do I really think the students are going to go out and use a sentence like, "Give these to them to give them to these"? Would the reader, after twisting

such a limited number of foreign words into a sentence describing a situation involving pieces of colored wood really believe this to be the type of sentence that could be memorized for later use at a bank or a beauty parlor, like a sentences from one of the model dialogues provided by so many ESL books, or would you know by these very unnatural conditions that you were studying something underlying the language? I can say from my experience as a student in a Japanese Silent Way class that I have known I was not memorizing sentences but learning grammar, and have found this to be fun and exciting.

If we do agree that it is helpful to exploit the functional vocabulary in this way, I think the teacher needs to develop a new kind of sensitivity to the language. I don't think it's enough simply to tie sentences into any old crazy knot. I think the knots need to be grammatically correct and should be selected for what they can reveal of the language. This is quite a challenge, one that I am just beginning to grapple with. I think it requires a sensitivity quite different from that of a native speaker or a grammarian of the target language.

In the end, as irreverent as this may sound, with half a dozen faces positively glued to some pieces of wood, brains whirring and eyes darting, time flying by, it almost seems beside the point to wonder if the students are speaking in the most natural way I can imagine. With the kind of energy present in the lesson I have described here, it almost seems beside the point to wonder about anything else. Who talks about rods for that long anyway?

Appendix

OTHER WAYS

In this paper, I have described rods used as rods, as semi-luxury and luxury vocabulary replacements to be glued together with functional vocabulary. I personally find this to be the most exciting way to use rods, one of the most productive and the most direct ways to reveal the spirit of a language to the learners. Rods are, however, used in other ways. I have seen them used as words or bits of words, placed end to end to form sentences then moved around to call attention to some aspect of word order or inflection.

I have seen rods used to create scenes, anything from a neighborhood, to a classroom, to a person sitting on a bed. Some excellent examples of scenes that can be created with rods may be found in Edward A. Combes' "An Introduction to Rods: Grammar and Story Telling" (MAT Independent Professional Project, School for International Training, 1982), in which he writes, "I first started using rods to tell stories when I was searching for a way to extricate myself as much as possible from my students' oral work . . . I understood that they needed clues. I didn't want them to come from me. I wanted their own ability and imagination to act as triggers for their oral speech. So, I had the idea of letting rods act as the clues."

A simple activity that I have used is to let the student construct a model of his or her old or current neighborhood, then describe it. In creating a relevant model like this, the student becomes invested in the project, making the language that follows much more meaningful. This and many other interesting activities are described in greater detail in Earl W. Stevick's A Way and Ways (Stevick 1980) where the rods are used in a way consistent with Stevick's interpretation of the Counseling-Learning educational approach.

Rods can also be used to represent abstract concepts--touchable, movable, changeable, brightly colored rods used to represent, among other things, something as invisible as time. It is this concept of time as embodied in the English verb tense-aspect system that I tried to represent with that time line made of rods in Chapter 2 of this paper.

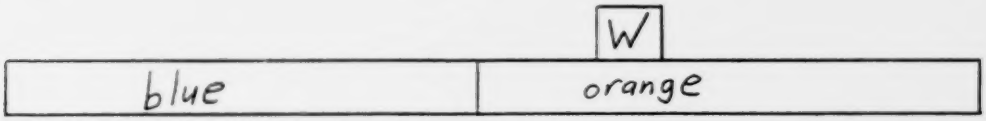
Throughout my winter internship, I continued to experiment with this time line and tried to extend it to other areas of the tense-aspect system. I don't include the details of this experimentation in the main body of this paper because it was never really the focus of an entire lesson, and when the time line did become more central to a particular lesson, it failed so miserably that I don't even think it would be instructive to recount the separate, isolated disasters.

The reason I include it in this paper at all is because, even after all the failure I have had with this idea, I think that there may still be something to the idea, if not for me then perhaps for the reader. Let me add that this rod time line concept need not necessarily be the focus of any one lesson. As in the conditional lesson described in

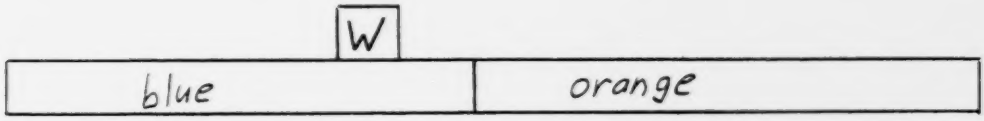
this paper, I have brought out the rod time line in the middle of many other lessons, if only for a few minutes, to help make clear some tense-aspect feature the students seem to be having difficulty with.

Let me first simply list some sentences and show how I would represent them with a rod time line.

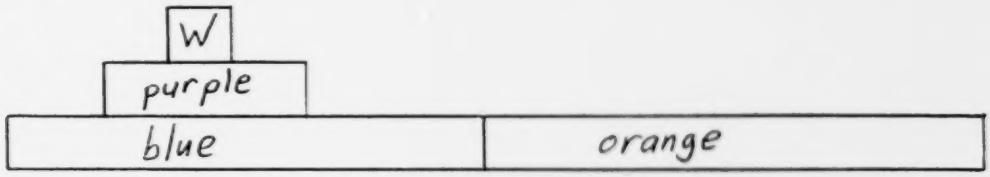
I will go to the store (I am going to go to the store)



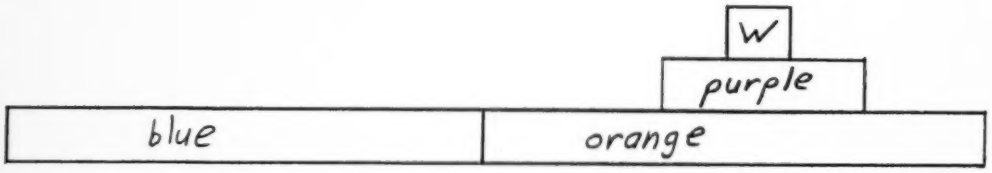
I went to the store



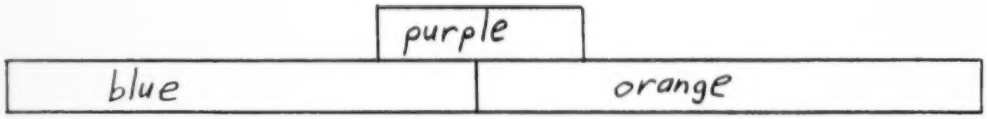
I was taking a shower when my friend called



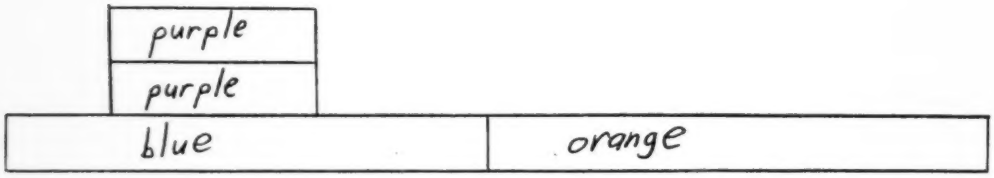
I will be working when she arrives at the airport



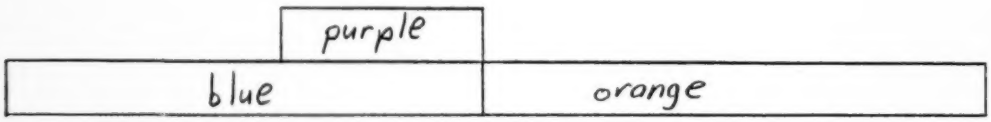
I'm studying English.



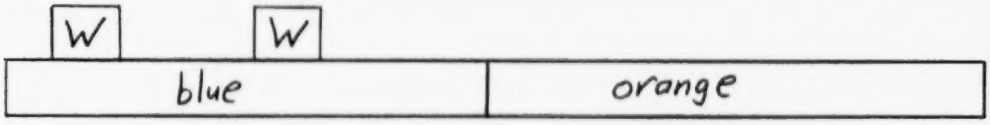
While I was working, he was drinking beer.



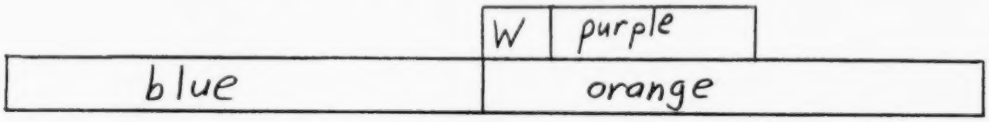
I have been married since 1991. (I have been married for three years.)



When I came home, they had finished painting the kitchen.



I will have finished the book by the time the class ends.



I ran into a couple problems in playing around with this time line. First of all, I have not found a satisfactory way to represent the uses of some tenses and aspects. How should one represent the simple present of a sentence like, "I play tennis every Tuesday"? A cube at the juncture of past and future? Isn't that right now, while "every Tuesday" in reality extends in both directions? How about the present perfect of "I've been to Thailand"? I have in the past represented this reference to an indefinite time in the past by picking up a cube, suspending it over the past portion of the time line and looking puzzled, then following it with a sentence like, "I went there last year," and finally placing the cube firmly on the blue line.

In wrestling with this time line, I have also been made more aware of the different meanings that may be expressed by the same tense or aspect and, conversely,

the same meanings represented by different tenses or aspects. Would you represent "My friend called me while I was taking a shower" any differently from "My friend called me while I was in the shower"? The tenses used are different but the meaning is almost the same. What about "I'm leaving for Chicago next week" and "I'm studying English"?

In short, I have found the English tense-aspect system too difficult to represent in all its complexity using a time line made of rods, or made of anything for that matter. I have, however, at times been able to draw distinctions between a couple elements within a small part of that system. Maybe that's enough.

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